

A Comparative Analysis of the 1994, 1998, and 2002 Election Campaigns for the Nikolayev City Council

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In the current process of societal modernization and transformation of the political system of Ukraine, one of the most important challenges facing the country is the formation of an effective system of local self-government. If such an institution is not developed and strengthened, there can be no discussion about the establishment of democratic, social government, the development of the rule of law, or the expansion of the infrastructure of civil society.

According to Ukraine's constitution, local government bodies are chosen by the citizens of the country through direct, free, and open elections (Article 141). On 31 March 2002, our country held its third round of local elections since becoming independent. Using the elections for the city council of Nikolayev as an example, I will compare the results of the most recent local government elections with the results of the elections that took place in 1994 and 1998.¹

The first point worth noting is the explosion of political activity among citizens. In 1994, 236 candidates ran for office. By 1998 the number of candidates increased 3.6 times to 859, and in 2002 a total of 991 people ran for ninety seats on the council. Over the course of eight years, the number of candidates per seat has increased from three to eleven. On one hand, the sharp increase in the number of people interested in becoming delegates to the city council indicates that the political and economic importance of this governing body is increasing, and that candidates understand that their personal influence in solving the city's problems would increase substantially were they to be elected. On the other hand, it is possible that this upsurge in political activity is connected with the understandable desire of some citizens to try their hands at a political campaign and gain practical experience for the elections in 2006. Additionally, it is possible that the increase in the number of candidates is caused by competition between parties to get as many representatives as possible into local government bodies.

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The most active participants in the council race were the following parties and blocs: "For a United Ukraine!" which ran 130 candidates (13.2 percent); the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United), with seventy-five candidates (7.6 percent); and the Communist Party of Ukraine, with fifty-nine candidates (6 percent). At the same time, the parties of the right demonstrated yet again that they have essentially no presence in southern Ukraine. Despite the presence of the all-Ukrainian "Bat'kivshchina" Union, a fairly large partisan organization, the Yulia Timoshenko Bloc was able to run only thirty-seven candidates (3.7 percent), and the twenty-one candidates (2.1 percent) put forward by "Our Ukraine" were only a "drop in the ocean." In total, 46.2 percent of all candidates in the council election were affiliated with political parties or blocs, an increase of 27.2 percent over the number of partisan candidates from 1994.

In regard to the age distribution of candidates, the 2002 elections saw the largest representation yet of people between the ages of forty-one and fifty, among both those who ran and those who were elected. As a rule, people at this age have solid convictions and substantial professional and life experience. They are free from the immature maximalist instincts of youth but are not yet burdened with the problems of old age. However, it is also important to note that over the past eight years the number of young people who participated in the elections has increased. In 1994 not a single candidate between eighteen and twenty years old ran for city council, and in 2002 six candidates fell into this age group. Although none of the young candidates was elected, the practical skills that they gained from running will likely help them in the next election.

An analysis of the data presented in table 1 shows that between 1994 and 2002 the number of candidates between twenty-one and thirty years old also increased. In 1994 three people in this age group were elected to the council, but in 1998, although the number of twenty-one to thirty-year-old candidates increased by 1.1 percent, none was elected. By 2002, nine of the elected delegates (10 percent of the total number) were in that age group. In 1994 the average age of members of the city council was forty-three years, and in 1998 the average reached fifty years. The 2002 elections, however, lowered the average age to forty-two.

How can such sharp changes in the preferences of voters be explained? The most likely answer is that the electorate has not developed strong convictions. Having entrusted power in 1994 to a group of fairly young people, the voters decided in 1998 to give their mandate to a substantially older group of delegates. In 2002 we witnessed a return to a more "youthful" government.

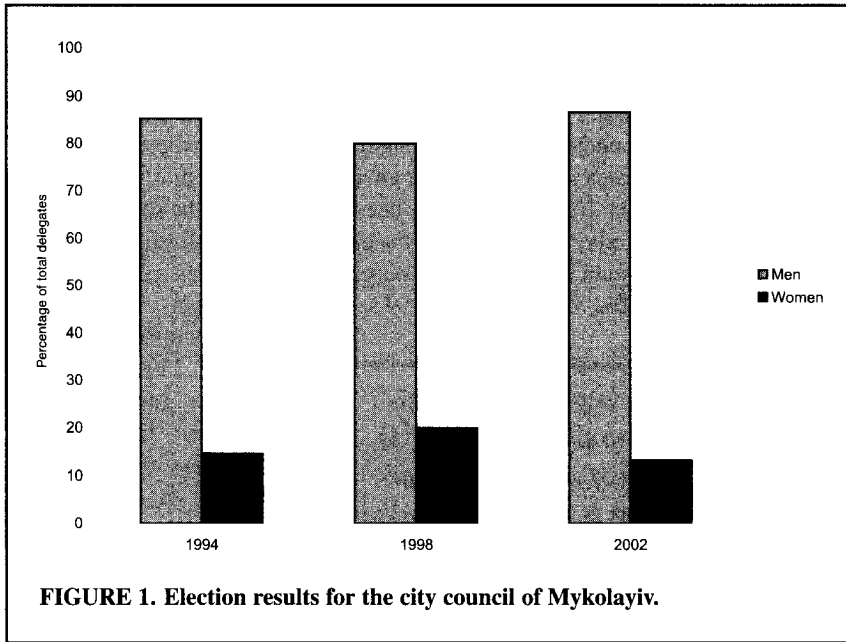
In terms of gender balance, men have clearly dominated the Nikolayev City Council for the past nine years. In 1998 there was a noticeable trend toward increased representation of women, but the 2002 elections demonstrated that women delegates are still not very popular among the electorate. This year's elections brought in the lowest percentage yet of women delegates—13.3 percent of the council (see figure 1). We can attribute this to two factors. First, the female population exhibits quite a low level of political activity; the small number of women candidates demonstrates this. Second, voters do not wish to see women in the role of delegates. It is likely that Ukrainian society has not reached

TABLE 1. Age of Candidates for and Delegates to the Nikolayev City Council

Age	Candidates 1994		Delegates 1994		Candidates 1998		Delegates 1998		Candidates 2002		Delegates 2002	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
18-20	0	-	0	-	5	0.6	0	-	6	0.6	0	-
21-30	16	6.7	3	4	65	7.6	0	-	101	10.2	9	10
31-40	78	32.8	23	30.7	205	23.9	17	18.9	168	17	27	30
41-50	92	38.7	34	45.3	347	40.4	27	30	384	38.7	35	38.9
51-60	46	19.3	14	18.7	195	22.7	35	38.9	254	25.6	15	16.7
61-70	6	2.5	1	1.3	34	3.6	7	7.8	70	0.7	4	4.4
Older than 70	0	-	0	-	8	0.9	4	4.4	8	0.8	0	-
Average age	43		43		44		50		45		42	

the level of political consciousness at which the gender of candidates makes no difference.

The results of elections in Ukraine have shown that a much higher percentage of incumbent mayors are re-elected than incumbent council members. There are several explanations for this. First, the mayor has the authority to resolve problems that council members cannot. Second, the mayor is a prominent person in his city and can use his power and prestige to significantly affect the results of the elections. Finally, according to the results of a survey that I conducted between March and June 1999, 64.5 percent of voters do not remember even the last name of the city council candidate for whom they voted.² In fact, of all the delegates



elected to the Nikolayev City Council in 1994, 1998, and 2002, only four could potentially be considered “honored delegates.” In the 1998 elections, however, thirteen members (14 percent) from the previous council were re-elected, and in the 2002 elections thirty-two council members (35.5 percent) were re-elected.

An analysis of the backgrounds of all the city council candidates shows that they can be conditionally divided into the following groups, based on whom they can be considered to represent: government administration, partisan groups, the financial-industrial sector, the business-commercial sector, and interest groups. The first category includes employees of the state administration, executive committees, and regulatory agencies. It also includes representatives of law enforcement agencies—traditional participants in elections. People with partisan backgrounds include all representatives of political parties, unions, and blocs. The financial-industrial category includes the upper management of large industrial and agricultural enterprises, both private and state-owned. As a rule, the financial-industrial sector is well represented in election campaigns.

The business-commercial category is a relatively new player in the electoral process. Its appearance is connected with the privatization process and recent increases in the political and economic importance of the private sector. The business-commercial sector includes representatives of small and medium-sized private businesses. Finally, interest groups include public organizations and social movements representing concrete social interests, for which participation in elections is only one of several areas of activity. Interest groups are often informal organizations and do not have stable structures. They are, rather, an aggregation of individual interests (special, sectoral, and status) transmitted to

the level of representative politics. For this reason, people such as teachers, doctors, journalists, students, and pensioners are categorized as representatives of special interest groups.

It is clear from figure 2 that over the past eight years the backgrounds of candidates for the city council have changed significantly. For example, since 1994 the number of candidates representing the government administrative sector has decreased by 9.1 percent. That has certainly been influenced by the socioeconomic situation in Ukraine. Today the majority of the electorate has realized that the existence of the nomenklatura economy only deepens the crisis in the country.

Representation of the financial-industrial sector in the Nikolayev City Council has remained constant since 1994. The representatives of this sector include directors of large firms, whose success at the polls is essentially guaranteed. In their arsenal they have large staffs of employees—a so-called solid electorate—who will vote for their bosses no matter how their businesses are run.

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It must be noted that in the latest elections the representation of interest groups in the council decreased by a factor of 1.7, while the number of representatives of the business elite increased by 16.8 percent. Unlike teachers, doctors, and other state employees, business people are not dependent on the city budget and executive committee for their salaries. After the 1998 elections, 14 percent of delegates to the council were doctors, and one-fourth were teachers.³ Finally, the number of candidates representing various political parties has nearly doubled. In 1994 and 1998 partisan representatives to the council were primarily members of the opposition, but the success of propresidential parties in the 2002 elections has begun a process of “partisanization” of the majority of delegates.

Nikolayev is generally considered an agricultural region and a part of Ukraine’s “Red Belt.” Although a very large number of political parties and unions have run candidates in both local and national elections, the Communist Party has maintained its traditionally strong position. It is the only political party that succeeded in getting its delegates elected in each of the three elections.

The 2002 elections brought about a change in the political landscape of Nikolayev, as we see from an analysis of the party preferences of Nikolayev residents in both the city council elections and the elections to the national parliament (see figure 3; only parties that passed the 4 percent barrier in the Verkhovnaia Rada were included in this comparison). The Communist Party, which won the largest number of votes in the elections to the Verkhovnaia Rada, was not the most popular party in the local elections. It was surpassed, for the first time, by the propresidential bloc “For a United Ukraine!”

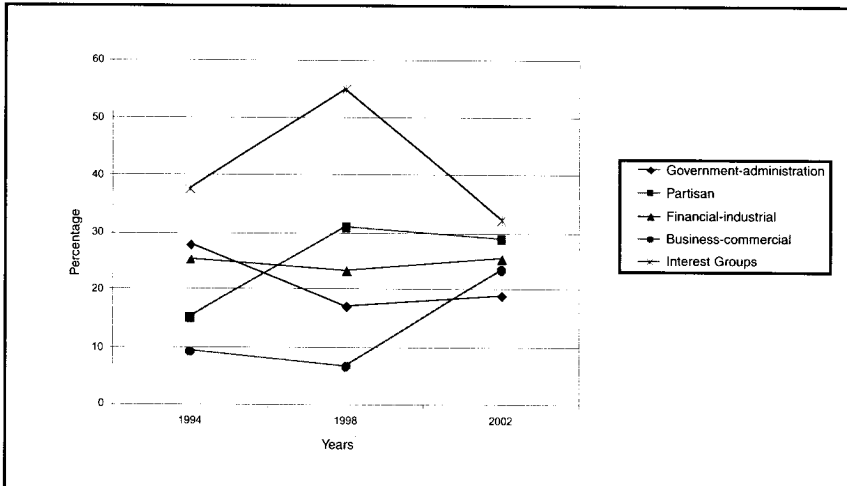


FIGURE 2. Candidate backgrounds.

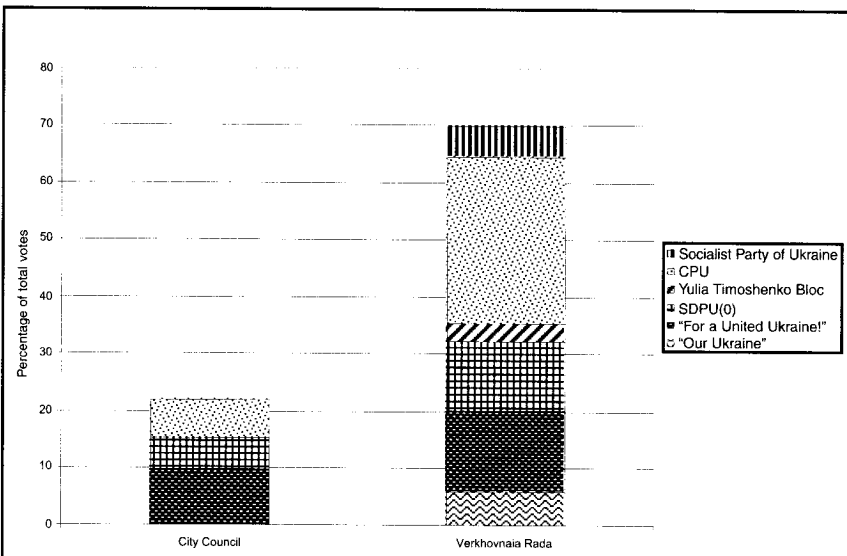


FIGURE 3. Party preferences of Nikolayev residents in city council and national parliament elections.

Because elections to local government bodies were again conducted in the shadow of elections to the national legislature, some races were more heavily campaigned than others and therefore drew more attention from voters. The races can be ranked in terms of intensity as follows: election of the mayor; election of delegates to the Verkhovnaia Rada in majority districts; election of delegates to

the Verkhovnaia Rada by proportional representation; and election of the city council. It is also worth noting that the city council elections received much less coverage in the local media than did the national elections.

All of this resulted in voters not being able to familiarize themselves with the city council candidates and their platforms. Due to the large number of candidates, the majority of voters decided whom to support based on one or more of the following superficial principles: "Delegates should be nonpartisan"; "vote for the party, not the person"; or "delegates must have good character." In addition, the gender of the candidate was also an important deciding factor. This is essentially the same situation that existed in 1998.

In comparing the results of the national and local elections, it must be noted that in Nikolayev, as in many other regions of Ukraine, the election of local government bodies took place under the strong ideological influence of the ruling parties and local officials. In this context, it is worth considering the fact that the vice chairman of the regional government, I. Shul'ga, is also the leader of the regional chapter of the Agrarian Party of Ukraine. The pre-election "endeavors" of Prime Minister Kinakh and Ministers Gureyev and Pustovoitenko were not without results. However, the "For a United Ukraine!" bloc's weaknesses in Nikolayev were its inadequate level of organization and the mutual hostility between some members of the bloc and local elites. As a result, the propresidential bloc was only able to present a general list of its candidates in Nikolayev region at the very last moment. Prime Minister Kinakh supported the candidacy of V. Chaiki, the current mayor, and the regional government brought forward its own candidate, V. Zagorui. This was announced on 2 January 2002 at a meeting of the administrative and economic leaders of the region. During this same meeting, participants announced their support of the "For a United Ukraine!" bloc and its candidates at all levels.⁴

Even the students of Nikolayev's institutions of higher education were subject to pressure from the regional government. For example, more than one thousand students of the Agricultural Academy cast their ballots for representatives of the propresidential camp: V. Shebanin, rector of the academy, for the city council; V. Zagorui for mayor; M. Rykhalsky for delegate to the Verkhovnaia Rada from the single-mandate district; and the bloc "For a United Ukraine!" in the party lists. Academy officials watched over the voting.⁵

Another factor explaining the discrepancy between the results of the local and national elections is the different psychological motivations of the electorate. When voting for a party, most citizens consider a number of issues: Is this party in favor of or against market reforms? What is its foreign policy orientation—pro-Western or pro-Russian? Is it an ally or an opponent of the current political regime?

When voting for representatives to local government bodies, however, people consider the personal characteristics of each candidate. In other words, they support those whom they know, whose names they have heard, or whom they have seen in person, even if only once. These might be people who are part of the government structure (factory directors, representatives of housing and communal services departments, civil servants) or people who are supported by the state

(school principals, hospital administrators). An important characteristic of both of these groups is that they are directly dependent on the policies of the current government. Among the candidates for city council in 2002 there were eighty-five doctors (of whom fifty-three were either departmental directors or head doctors of various hospitals), 116 teachers (of whom twenty-one were principals), 145 directors of public and private enterprises, and 125 civil servants.

To study issues of local self-government and determine the impact that personal characteristics of candidates have on the electoral preferences of voters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, I surveyed 135 law and political science students from the Nikolayev branch of the I. I. Mechnikov Odessa National University. The maximum error of the sample does not exceed 5 percent. When the survey results were analyzed, eight responses were rejected as invalid.

For 60 percent of the respondents, fame and local reputation are factors in determining whether or not to vote for a candidate. One-third of students believe that council members should have political experience. Some respondents also take into consideration the candidate's profession and previous leadership experience (38 percent and 32 percent, respectively). It is also noteworthy that nearly one-quarter of respondents consider the age and gender of the candidate. For 15 percent of students, how the candidate conducts his or her campaign is important. Only one in twelve students considers candidates' party affiliations.

Young people want city council members to be competent (47 percent), responsible (41 percent), honest (37 percent), respectable (31 percent), and capable of solving the problems of the city (80 percent). The majority of students believe that council members should have a higher education. However, 27 percent consider a degree in economics preferable, 22 percent prefer a candidate's degree to be in law, and 19 percent prefer a political science background. For 7 percent a candidate's educational background is unimportant.

The survey results also demonstrate that 40 percent of students want to take part in solving civic problems, and one-fifth would like to become city council members themselves. This sense of civil activism is confirmed by increased participation of young people in elections. In 1994 only one student ran for a position in local government, but in 2002 there were twenty-six student candidates (seven of whom were students at the Nikolayev branch of Odessa National University). Clearly, young people are prepared to play a conscientious role in addressing the important issues of public life.

Conclusion

The 2002 local elections in Nikolayev were in many ways similar to the elections of 1994 and 1998, but there were a number of specific differences. In comparison with the 1994 elections, the number of competitors for each seat on the city council increased 3.5 times. The gender and age composition of the council underwent substantial changes. It has become more masculine and younger—78.9 percent of delegates are under fifty years of age. The results of the 2002 election also determined that two-thirds of council members would be new delegates.

Over the past eight years representation of government officials and interest groups on the council has decreased, while the representation of the business-commercial sector has increased and the representation of the financial-industrial sector has remained essentially unchanged. The role of political parties and electoral blocs has become stronger at all stages of the campaign process. At the same time, however, the politics of these parties at the local level are so amorphous and indistinct that there is little discernable difference between left, right, and centrist approaches to municipal issues.

The local elections of 2002 demonstrated a serious deficit of political and legal culture among the different participants in the voting process, including the voters themselves. Comparing the results of the city council and Verkhovnaia Rada elections, it is important to note that the local campaign was subject to strong ideological influences from the executive power structure, thus providing exactly the results that the ruling elite hoped for. The election also showed that voters have different motivations. In contrast to the elections to the Verkhovnaia Rada, where candidates are chosen by party affiliation, in local races voters base their decisions on personality, choosing either people they know or people they see as having real ability to address the problems of the city and district. These conclusions are supported by the results of my survey of university students. The survey also demonstrated that over the past eight years young people have gone from indifference toward politics to a desire to actively participate in the political process in Ukraine, including at the local level.

NOTES

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1. *Vechernii Nikolaev*. The 2002 election campaign occurred in February–April, the 1998 campaign January–April, and the 1994 campaign May–July.

2. O. Yatsunska, "Problemi stanovlennia mistseвого samovriaduvannia v Ukraini: Dosvid sotsiologichnogo analizu," *Liudina i politika* 4 (2002).

3. *Ibid.*

4. A. Kuznetsov, "Mikoaiiv: misto i elektoral'ne pole v tumani," *Merezha analitichnikh tsentriv Ukraini*, 4 March 2002, <www.intellect.org.ua>.

5. I. Ivannikov, "Golosui – abo vizhenut' z vuzu!," *Politichna Ukraina*, an informational project of the Committee for Elections in Ukraine, 29 March 2002, <<http://polit.com.ua>>; Iu. Didenko, "V Mikolaevi v agrarnii akademii student masovo golosuiut' za vidkripliuval'nimi talonami do mistsevikh rad," 31 March 2002, <<http://polit.com.ua>>.